

know if it is going to be wildfires or droughts or hurricanes or tornados. We are not going to deny that help. But it should be budgeted just like everything we do. We should have some sense that we have prepared for it. Preparing for disasters should be part of our budget. There is not a business in this country that does not prepare for disasters. The government should do it too.

I hope we will be on a trajectory to lower the spending, keeping our agreement of August with the Omnibus appropriations bill that is going to be passed by the House this afternoon and will come to the Senate. I hope we will be able to act by tomorrow on that piece of legislation that keeps the agreements we made.

It is a down payment. It is not what all of us wanted, but I think we ought to put in disaster relief. I think we ought to pay for that with another 1.83-percent cut across the board. I think that would be the responsible approach, and then we can start next year on the long term. That would be regulatory reform, Social Security reform—to make it solvent for 75 years, at least—and Medicare reform. Those are the things that will give us a long-term, hopefully, solvent government that will be the model for the world because, is there any question that we need a model in the world right now for fiscal discipline and responsible governing? I hope America can provide it.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to make some observations about the Keystone Pipeline. President Obama has said his first priority is jobs. Here is an opportunity for the President to show it, a pipeline provision that, according to some estimates, would create thousands of jobs right away. In fact, those are all the estimates I have seen, that this is a project that is ready to go.

Here is an opportunity for the President to say he is not going to let a few radical environmentalists stand in the way of a project that will create thousands of jobs and make America more secure at the same time. The labor unions support the pipeline, the Chamber of Commerce supports the pipeline, out-of-work Americans support it, and a growing number of Democrats are expressing their support as well.

Here are a few of the comments we heard from Democrats just this very week. Senator KENT CONRAD of North Dakota said:

I personally think the pipeline is absolutely in the national interest. It'll help us

reduce our dependence on foreign energy, at least foreign sources that are hostile to our interests.

Senator CONRAD further said:

I, for one, on this side hope that this could be part of a final package and I hope that this is something we could work through in the coming hours.

Senator McCASKILL:

If States rights are being protected and if this is going to be something maybe, that we can try to jump start the approval process, make it go more quickly.

Representative CLYBURN, one of the leaders of the Democratic conference in the House:

I'm very much for the pipeline. There is no question about that.

Congress should do something, not just assist people who are struggling in a down economy or out of work, but help incentivize job creation for them at the same time. In other words, let's not just pass a bill that helps people on the benefits side; let's also include something that actually helps the private sector create the jobs Americans need for the long term. This is the balanced approach Americans want, one that extends help but also offers hope.

This is just the kind of thing we should be doing around here. Both parties like it, the labor unions like it, why in the world wouldn't we want to put it in the package?

The only reason the White House has given for opposing the pipeline provision is they would rather vote on it alone, which makes absolutely no sense. You are either for the provision or you are not. So I suggest here is a rare opportunity to do something truly positive together on a bipartisan basis at the end of the year. Let's finish this year on a truly cooperative, bipartisan note. Let's strengthen our Nation's energy security, decrease the energy we import from overseas, create American jobs right now, and let's do it all on a bipartisan basis.

As I said, there is bipartisan support for this project. We need to get it done, and we need to get it done now. The House of Representatives has been quite clear that they are not going to support a package that does not include the pipeline. Frankly, I would not be able to support a package that doesn't include the pipeline. I think this is something we could all be proud of at the end of the year, demonstrating to the American people that we can work together not only to help those who are struggling, through a continuation of the payroll tax holiday and an unemployment benefits package, but also create jobs at the same time in the private sector without a penny of the Federal Government's money by moving this pipeline along.

After all, it has undergone years of environmental studies. It is ready to go. The company is ready to hire the people just as soon as we give them the signoff.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I thank those who have listened to our e-mails back in Florida that we just sent out alerting them I will be speaking on the Senate floor, maybe the last time I will speak this year.

I want to take a few minutes to update everyone on what this first year in the Senate has been like. First of all, it has been a tremendous privilege and honor. There is not a day goes by that I do not come to this building early in the morning, when I can get to the gym—I probably should do that more than I do—and see this building lit up in the darkness. It takes my breath away that I actually get to work here in this building on behalf of the people of the State of Florida.

I recognize what an honor and privilege it is to have this position, not just in this unique institution—which is different, perhaps, than any legislative body in all of history—but this Republic that stands out in the history of mankind. As Americans, we should always take a moment to recognize that in America, on this floor, we debate and sometimes solve issues other countries fight wars with each other about. That is a real blessing and a real opportunity to be an example for the world. I am grateful and feel blessed to be a part of it, and I thank the people of Florida for the opportunity to do it.

I want to share two observations as this year comes to an end—and, hopefully, today or tomorrow, sometime this week, we will wrap up our work in this body for 2011—observations I have after my first year. I think I am 3 weeks from having been sworn in for the first time. There are a couple of things that concern me.

First is a real lack of urgency. There are some major issues that confront America. These have to be confronted. We need look no further than Europe to see what our future holds, unfortunately, if some of the issues that now confront us are not confronted. That is not hyperbole, it is not partisanship, it is reality—it is math. This country borrows more money than it needs to or should. This is a country that is now spending more money than it takes in at an alarming pace, and there is no plan in place to prevent that.

That is not a partisan observation; that is not a Republican concern or a Democratic concern; that is the concern of every person who is grounded in

reality, that we cannot continue doing what we are doing now.

There are specific programs that are in trouble that we should be very concerned about. Medicare is one example. I have a very special place in my heart for Medicare. No. 1, there are a lot of people in Florida who are on Medicare; and, No. 2, in my own life, both in my father's illness last year before he passed away and this year when my mother suffered some setbacks in her health, I have seen firsthand how important Medicare is.

There are two things that worry me about Medicare. The first is that it will not be there when my generation and future generations retire. The other is just as important: that somehow, if we fail to act in a timely manner, people like my mother, who are currently on Medicare, may at some point in their lifetime see their benefits change dramatically or see the program and quality of access decline.

We need to do everything we can to save Medicare. We know for a fact, and no one can dispute, if we leave Medicare the way it is right now, that program is going to be in a lot of trouble. I hope there is a sense of urgency about that. Also, the fact that our economy is now smaller than our debt—\$15 trillion is a lot of money we owe, that our children and our grandchildren will owe. That is a lot of money. That is a big deal. The national security threats we face are significant and have to be confronted.

The sense that somehow the major issues can wait until another election or another moment concern me because these issues have a tendency to sneak up on us and a problem becomes a crisis. It is a lot harder to solve a crisis than it is to solve a problem, so I hope we have a sense of urgency with regard to these issues in the coming year.

There is another issue I would like to talk about, which is a troubling emergence in the last year in politics. It is this rhetoric that, in my opinion, seeks to divide Americans against each other, basically pits Americans against each other.

The way the rhetoric basically goes is, there is a reason there are Americans who are struggling, hurting; a reason that people have lost their jobs; that people are working twice as hard and are making half as much; that people have lost their homes, and people have graduated from college but cannot find a job. And there is a theme by some, including, frankly, many in our political leadership and from time to time even the White House, saying to people the reason they are doing worse is because there is a handful of people out there doing too well. The reason they have lost their jobs is because someone else is being too greedy. The reason they are losing their homes is because someone else owns too many homes. The reason they are making less money is because someone else is making too much money.

I am troubled by that rhetoric that pits people against each other because the second part of that argument is give the government more power; give us, government, more power so we can step in and right this wrong, so we can take away from the people who have too much and give to the people who do not have enough.

Let me tell you why I am troubled by that. The first reason I am troubled by that is because it is absolutely not the kind of country we have been for 220-some-odd years. It is not in our nature. Americans have never been a people to drive through a nice neighborhood and say: Oh, I hate the people who live in these nice houses. Americans are people who drive through a nice neighborhood and say: Congratulations on your nice house. Guess what. We will be joining you soon.

We have never been people who go around and confront people or look at people who have been financially successful and say: We hate you. We envy you because of how well you are doing. Americans have celebrated their success, and they say: Guess what. We are going to be successful soon as well.

I remember growing up, I always tell people I am a child of privilege because I have the privilege and the honor of being born in the greatest country in human history and of having a mother and a father who were married, loved each other and lived in our home. These are two of the most important benefits anyone could have. But my parents were working-class folks. My dad was a bartender for most of his life. My mom was a maid and cashier and stock clerk at K-Mart. We were not people of financial means in terms of significant financial wealth.

I tell them I always had what I needed. I didn't always have what I wanted, but I always had what I needed. My parents always provided that. I don't remember them telling us or teaching us the only way we could be more successful was if other people were less successful. They never inculcated in us the belief that somehow in order for us to climb the ladder, other people had to come down from the ladder.

On the contrary, they would hold up these examples of success to inspire in us the hope that someday we could be there as well—financially, in our careers, what have you. We are people who have always celebrated other people's success so long as we always had the opportunity to meet that success ourselves. That is the American nature. That is the American character. That is what makes us different from the rest of the world.

I am afraid we could lose that or are on the verge of losing that. I am concerned that there are those in America's political leadership who are advocating that we abandon that in favor of something else. I think it is wrong because it does not work. That thought process that somehow other people have to be worse off in order for us to be better off does not work. People get

on boats, people jump fences to get away from that kind of thought process. People flee countries that do that because it does not work. It never has.

It will not work here. The proof is in the numbers. Let's put aside partisan political rhetoric for a moment and look at the numbers. In January of 2009, when the President was sworn in, he inherited a very bad economy. He inherited a bad economy. He inherited an economy, for example, that had 12 million people out of a job, an economy where gas was \$1.85 a gallon, where the debt was at \$10.6 trillion, where we were 39 million Americans living in poverty in January of 2009. He inherited a bad economy.

But for the first years of his Presidency, at least one of the first 2 years, he had 60 votes in the Senate which I quickly learned is the way everything seems to happen around here, by 60 votes. He had a majority in the House. He could have anything he wanted, and he said: This is what I want. This is what the President said: He wanted a stimulus package, and he got it. He wanted his health care package, and he got it. He wanted financial services reform, and he got it. So what happened? Let's look at the numbers.

He became President, bad economy, got everything he wanted. What has happened since? Now there are 13.3 million people unemployed, gas is now at \$3.27 a gallon on average, the debt is now up to \$15 trillion, and people in poverty—39 million when he took office, 46 million people now.

Put aside the partisan rhetoric for a moment—just the numbers. He became President, got everything he wanted, and everything got worse. Those are the facts.

Is that because he is a bad person? Of course not. It is ridiculous. It is because his view of government and politics is wrong and those who share it are wrong. They are not un-American, they are not bad people, but the proof is it doesn't work. It has not worked anywhere else in the world to approach it this way, and it is not going to work here. I hope in this new year we will reverse course on these things and instead embrace and take up that which does work in America.

What makes America become more prosperous? It is not that complicated. It is not Fortune 500 companies or big corporations. Every country in the world has rich people. Every country in the world has billionaires and millionaires. What makes us different is that here a worker can become an owner, an employee can become an employer. It happens all the time. You cannot walk two blocks anywhere in this country and not bump into somebody who didn't start a business out of the spare bedroom of their home, who didn't take their credit card or their lifesavings and risked it all behind a great idea and today 20 people work for them. That is 20 families being fed, 20 families sending kids to college because somebody had the audacity to take

their lifesavings and pursue their dream. So they opened a business out of the spare bedroom of their home; they opened a business out of a corner in their garage; and nowadays you can start a business with a laptop and an empty table at a Starbucks, and it works. We have to get back to that.

What stands in the way of that are three things, above everything else. The first is a Tax Code that is crazy. It is not complicated, it is not burdensome, it is crazy. It is the craziest thing you have ever seen in your life. First of all, it is full of loopholes and exemptions built in. That doesn't hurt the big guys. It doesn't hurt billionaires and millionaires and big corporations. These guys can handle this stuff. They may not like it, but they can hire lawyers, accountants, and lobbyists. They can figure this stuff out. You know who a complicated Tax Code kills? The guy or gal trying to start a business out of the spare bedroom of their home. We have to simplify our Tax Code. It has to be reformed. If there is stuff in it that is the result of good lobbying as opposed to good policy, take it out. I hope we will work on that. Everybody here says they are for tax reform, so do it. Let's have urgency. Let's have some urgency behind that.

The second is regulations. Look, we need to have regulations. Here is a glass of water. I don't want this to have poison in it. I want our air to be clean. Government has a role to play in those things. Let me tell you what happens when regulations go too far, when they seem to exist only for the purpose of justifying the existence of a regulator. You don't hurt the guys who have made it; you don't hurt the big corporations or the billionaires. These guys can hire lawyers to deal with that stuff, and they can hire lobbyists to change all that stuff. It kills the people trying to start a business out of the spare bedroom of their home. So we have to simplify the regulatory system we have in this country as well.

Finally, this debt. The debt is a problem. There is no plan in place to do anything about it. People are afraid, concerned, worried—and rightfully so—about investing money in an economy that doesn't have a plan to pay its bills. I hope we reverse course on all of these issues. If we do, it will lead to prosperity.

Let me tell you what prosperity will lead to. It will lead to more jobs, more jobs will lead to more taxpayers, more taxpayers will lead to more revenue, and more revenue means we will have money to pay down our debt and do what government should do, such as our national defense, invest in infrastructure and in our people, and provide a safety net to help those who cannot help themselves.

To do that, it all starts with embracing the fundamental principle of America's prosperity. We have never been a nation of haves and have-nots. We are a nation of haves and soon-to-haves, of

people who have made it and people who will make it. That is who we need to remain if we desire to provide our children with what we had, an American century, which is what the 21st century can be, should be, and will be. If in 2012 this body and our leadership reverse course from the direction we are headed, it will place us on a path that is true to our heritage as a people and embrace for our children and grandchildren a future they deserve, a prosperous and growing America where all things are possible, where anyone from anywhere can accomplish anything, where the son of a bartender and a maid can be a U.S. Senator, and where anyone watching, no matter where you start out in life, can accomplish and be anything you want to accomplish if you are willing to work hard, play by the rules and have the ability to do it.

With that, I want to wish all of my colleagues and the people of Florida and the people of the United States a merry Christmas, a happy Hanukkah, and a happy New Year. May God always bless our country and may 2012 bring us the safety and prosperity for our Nation and for the world.

I thank the Chair.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DISASTERS IN 2011

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I will take the opportunity while the floor is relatively quiet to come and explain one of the votes we are going to be asked to cast tomorrow. In fact, it is very timely that I am here on the Senate floor at 2 o'clock in the afternoon because the House, I understand, just passed H. Con. Res. 94, and I am going to ask the Senate to reject that resolution when it comes here tomorrow for our vote. I am asking Democrats and Republicans to join with me in voting no on that resolution. I would like to take a few minutes to explain why. I think pictures are worth a thousand words, so let me just use four to save time.

This is about disasters in 2011. This whole issue is about how we should budget for disasters. It is an important debate that has been one of the many debates Congress has had over this last year, and we are wrapping up that debate in the next 48 hours. So this is a part of that debate.

I think pictures speak louder than words. This is a picture of Joplin, MO, a town that was virtually wrecked by a

massive and monster tornado and tornadoes.

This is a picture of the Mississippi River flooding in Cairo, IL. This year, the Mississippi River was at one of its highest levels in some places in over a century. We received our own share of that flooding in Louisiana, which sits at the base of this great Mississippi River basin. So our people, as well as people along the entire Mississippi River Valley, experienced unprecedented flooding.

The lonely and distraught couple sitting in what looks like the middle of an ocean is actually in Nags Head, NC. This is what happened to their beach home as water virtually surrounded them and destroyed that community. Again, this happened this year with Hurricane Irene.

Down here on the far right is a picture of the fires that raged and devastated parts of Texas, which experienced one of the worst droughts in the recorded history of Texas.

What is sad about this debate is I could show picture after picture after picture of communities in our country devastated by tornadoes, fires, hurricanes—disasters that strike without warning and whose impact is virtually impossible to measure until months afterward because of the extraordinary damage. In fact, the Weather Service just this month did a recalculation of 2011 and declared it to be one of the worst disaster years since records have been kept, saying they have now concluded, as enough evidence has come in, that we had over 12 disasters in 1 year—in this year of 2011—over \$1 billion each.

So this year was a real outlier, but sadly—and the Presiding Officer has heard it in his State, and we have heard it in my State of Louisiana, and we have heard it around the world—these pictures may not be an aberration. These pictures may show what is to come. And while 2011 was a very bad year, people are starting to think that as a result of the changes in temperature and climate change—and whatever people think the reasons are for that, no one should disagree with the consequences of changing temperature, which are violent weather episodes. The question is, What are we going to do about it and what is the right way to move forward? Let me show my colleagues what the wrong way is before I explain the right way.

This picture depicts the wrong way to respond. This has been suggested by some of my Republican colleagues. They suggest that when the water rises on your home or when the tornado rips you out of your bed and the roof falls on you and your family or when the river water rises and you look out of your second-floor window over your 100- or 200-acre farm and you can't see anything and your cows are swimming and your horses are swimming as well, that what you should do is climb on your roof, call Washington, call the hotline, and identify the offset in the